

2001 Annual Report Executive Summary

McDowell County Enterprise Community

It is the second fall of a new century and I find myself, yet again, marveling at the resiliency of the many fine people of McDowell County. It is virtually impossible to adequately explain, especially since I have been hard at work for nine years to explain to myself, the power of resiliency and its cultural significance to southern West Virginia. By virtue of my own empiricism, I have witnessed this irrevocable resiliency in the malignant poverty resulting from the economic downturn of the '60s; in the surprise 1999 failure of the First National Bank of Keystone (the largest bank failure in the history of the FDIC), and in spite of the comprehensive carnage created by the flood of July, 2001 (the most costly natural disaster to date). For a fleeting moment, I begin to doubt this resiliency. I question the seriousness of my people's resolve. No matter the causative factors and the force of the blows, the people bounce back. It is as if the people are bouncing on a trampoline of distress, or being manipulated at the hands of a marionette of despair. Nevertheless, the people bounce back. I could expand these thoughts, synthesize them further, and make excuses for the inability of my people to evacuate themselves from the descending spiral of economic decay; to conjure up a litany of socio-economic indices and factors that validate their unacceptable absence from the rapidly moving escalator of upward mobility. Rather, this document represents a forum of perceptions, ideas, feelings, solutions and triumphs. It pays tribute to their beliefs about what is important. It establishes a sense of purpose. It embodies their resilience. It resonates with the recurring theme of restoration, transformation, leadership, wisdom and hope—the very foundation upon which McDowell County will rebuild and reinvent itself. For far too many years, poverty has whispered in the people's ear. It has known their names. It has defined their lives. It has dictated their future. Poverty has not, however, discovered the people's antidote to this malignancy—resiliency. The McDowell County Action Network (McCAN) had its genesis in 1994 upon receiving \$2.95 million in SSBG funds and the designation as an Enterprise Community from the Clinton Administration. McCAN developed **REBUILDING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION: A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR MCDOWELL COUNTY**, to serve as a blueprint for McDowell County's economic development plans for the twenty-first century and beyond.

These principles that have guided both the vision that is propelling McDowell County's economic and community development initiatives are:

- ⌘ To promote the economic independence of families and individuals. To create and strengthen a vital, viable and diverse economy.
- ⌘ To ensure a desirable quality of life and a safe/healthy living environment.
- ⌘ To strengthen communities' and the county's capacity to build for the future. To create a pro-family system of integrated services to children and families that enhances their ability to succeed and become self-sufficient.

Today, as a very active, vital and synergistic Enterprise Community Corporation, McCAN and its collaborators continue to implement this revitalization philosophy through a decentralized, community-based structure and process that provides innovative, practical and timely programs, products and services which emphasize education, job creation and the development of problem solving skills for people and neighborhoods.